



Guide for

Computer User Support Specialists in California

May also be called: Computer Specialists; Computer Support Specialists; Computer Technicians; Help Desk Analysts; Help Desk Technicians; Information Technology (IT) Specialists; and Support Specialists

What Would I Do?

Computer User Support Specialists, also called Help Desk Technicians, provide help and advice to people and organizations using computer software and equipment. They usually give technical assistance to non-information technology (IT) computer users and respond to phone and e-mail requests for help. Sometimes they make site visits so they can solve a problem in person. The range of problems they solve varies by industry and firm. Those who work for large software or support service firms assist business customers in using complex systems, while those who work in call centers handle simpler problems from consumers.

Computer User Support Specialists listen to customers when they describe their computer problems, ask questions to properly diagnose the problem, and walk them through the problem-solving steps. They also set up or repair computer equipment and related devices. User Support Specialists train users on new computer hardware or software, such as printing, installation, word processing, and e-mail. In addition, they document and track user questions and problems and may share information with others within the organization.

Tools and Technology

Computer User Support Specialists use a variety of tools and technology in their work. In addition to computers, they may use computer tool kits, hard disk arrays, network analyzers, power meters, reflectometers, multi-line telephones, and tablets or smart phones. They may also use software such as backup or archival, configuration management, database user interface and query, desktop communications, Internet directory services, and operating system software.

Important Tasks and Related Skills

Each task below is matched to a sample skill required to carry out the task.

Task	Skill Used in this Task
Oversee the daily performance of computer systems.	Computers and Electronics
Answer user inquiries regarding computer software or hardware operation to resolve problems.	Customer and Personal Service

Enter commands and observe system functioning to verify correct operations and detect errors.	Near Vision
Set up equipment for employee use, performing or ensuring proper installation of cables, operating systems, or appropriate software.	Information Ordering
Install and perform minor repairs to hardware, software, or peripheral equipment, following design or installation specifications.	Critical Thinking
Maintain records of daily data communication transactions, problems and remedial actions taken, or installation activities.	Time Management
Read technical manuals, confer with users, or conduct computer diagnostics to investigate and resolve problems or to provide technical assistance and support.	Reading Comprehension
Refer major hardware or software problems or defective products to vendors or technicians for service.	Oral Expression
Develop training materials and procedures, or train users in the proper use of hardware or software.	Written Expression
Confer with staff, users, and management to establish requirements for new systems or modifications.	Oral Comprehension

Source: U.S. Department of Labor [Occupational Information Network \(O*NET\)](http://online.onetcenter.org) at online.onetcenter.org.

Working Conditions

Computer User Support Specialists normally work in well-lit, comfortable offices, computer laboratories, or call centers. They spend much of their time interacting with customers and other team members. Telecommuting is becoming more common allowing User Support Specialists to work in remote locations away from their main office. They usually work 40 hours a week, but that may include evening or weekend work if the employer requires computer support during those hours. Overtime may be necessary when unexpected technical problems arise. Some workers may also need to be available on an on-call basis.

Some jobs require physical strength to lift hardware, such as computers and monitors, and the agility to install cables and peripheral hardware, often in tight spaces. Like other workers who use a computer for long periods, User Support Specialists are susceptible to eyestrain, back discomfort, and hand and wrist problems. Some User Support Specialist positions may require travel.

Union membership is not common in this occupation; however, User Support Specialists who work for government agencies may belong to the Service Employees International Union.

Will This Job Fit Me?

The job of Computer User Support Specialists may appeal to those who enjoy activities that involve practical hands-on problems and solutions. The Computer User Support Specialist occupation involves following set procedures and routines as well as searching for facts and figuring out problems. Individuals who enjoy providing service to others and value job security and good working conditions should enjoy working in this occupation.

Computer User Support Specialists should have strong interpersonal and customer service skills, excellent oral and written communication skills, and a pleasant telephone manner. Remaining calm and focused while helping people, who may be highly stressed, will help them put frustrated customers at ease. They need to be able to work both independently as well as on a team. They also maintain

effective working relationships with both internal and external customers. User Support Specialists need good diagnostic and problem-solving skills to troubleshoot and resolve issues. They should be flexible and able to adapt to changing priorities.

What Wages and Benefits Can I Expect?

Wages

A formal salary survey for Computer User Support Specialists is not available; however, their earnings are typically comparable to the broader group of Computer Support Specialists. According to the Occupational Employment Statistics Survey, wages in 2012 for Computer Support Specialists in California range from \$42,340 to \$73,411 annually, or \$20.35 to \$35.29 hourly. The median wage is \$55,910 annually or \$26.88 hourly. The median is the point at which half of the workers earn more and half earn less.

Benefits

Most Computer User Support Specialists receive medical, dental, and life insurance, as well as vacation, sick leave, and retirement plans from their employers. Some employers may also offer stock options or education reimbursement.

What is the Job Outlook?

Computer User Support Specialists should enjoy favorable job prospects. As organizations upgrade their computer equipment and software, more support services will be required. Employment growth should be especially strong in the health care industry. As the use of IT increases, support services will be crucial to keep systems running properly. In addition, the growth of electronic commerce and expansion of new mobile technologies, such as wireless Internet, will continue to increase the demand for User Support Specialists.

Even though demand in this occupation is strong, some call center jobs are still outsourced to other countries. However, in order to keep some of these jobs on U.S. soil, some employers are moving existing workers to lower-cost regions to offset some of the losses.

How Do I Qualify?

Education, Training, and Other Requirements

Entrance requirements for this occupation vary; some employers prefer to hire applicants who have a bachelor's degree, and others may accept an associate degree in computer information science and practical work experience. Lower-level help desk or call center jobs may require some computer knowledge, but not necessarily a post-secondary degree. After they are hired, Computer User Support Specialists usually receive about three months of on-the-job training or longer for more complex jobs. In addition, some employers require candidates to pass a background clearance.

Early Career Planning

High school students interested in this kind of work should take classes in mathematics, computer science, information technology, and language arts. Other useful classes may include business, physical science, and engineering technology. Training is also available through Regional Occupational Programs (ROP) in areas such as computer support services, computer support specialist, computer support technician, computer technician, and help desk technician. To find an ROP program near you, go to the California Association of Regional Occupational Centers and Programs website at www.carocp.org/carocps.html.

Continuing Education

As technology continues to improve and evolve, Computer User Support Specialists need to keep their skills current and acquire new ones. Many colleges and universities, private schools, associations, employers, and hardware and software vendors offer relevant training.

Certification

Although certification is optional, it can enhance career development and advancement. Computer information science certificate programs offered by many community colleges, private schools, and software and hardware product vendors, will help applicants qualify for entry-level positions. For more information, go to the U.S. Department of Labor's Career InfoNet website at www.acinet.org and scroll down to "Career Tools." Select "Certification Finder" at www.acinet.org/certifications_new/default.aspx and follow the instructions to locate certification programs.

Where Can I Find Training?

There are two ways to search for training information at www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov/?Pageid=1013:

- [Search by Field of Study](#) to find what programs are available and what schools offer those programs. You may use keywords such as: Computer Support, Help Desk, and Information Technology.
- [Search by Training Provider](#) to find schools by name, type of school, or location.

Contact the schools you are interested in to learn about the classes available, tuition and fees, and any prerequisite course work.

Where Would I Work?

Computer User Support Specialists work in a variety of industries, such as IT, education, finance, health care, telecommunications, and government.

Finding a Job

Networking is important in this occupation, since many Computer User Support Specialists find work through referrals. Jobs can also be found through direct application to employers, newspaper classified advertisements, online job boards, and professional organizations. **Online job opening systems** include JobCentral at www.jobcentral.com and CalJOBSSM at www.caljobs.ca.gov.

To find your nearest One-Stop Career Center, go to [Service Locator](#) at www.servicelocator.org. View the [helpful job search tips](#) at www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov/occguides/JobSearchTips.pdf for more resources (requires [Adobe Reader](#)).

Yellow Page Headings

You can focus your local job search by checking employers listed online or in your local telephone directory. Below are some suggested headings where you might find employers of Computer User Support Specialists.

- Computer Network Design & Systems
- Computer Service & Repair
- Computer System Designers & Consultants
- Government Offices
- Internet Access Providers Wireless
- Internet Service Providers (ISP)
- Temporary Agencies

Find Possible Employers

To locate a list of employers in your area, use “Find Employers” on the LaborMarketInfo website at www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov/aspdotnet/databrowsing/empMain.aspx?menuChoice=emp.

- Select the search for employers by occupation.
- Select a geographic area.
- Search for an occupation by keyword, occupation, or category.
- Select one of the top industries that employ the occupation. This will give you a list of employers in that industry in your area.
- Select “View Filter Selections” to limit your list to specific cities or employer size.
- Select an employer for the street address, telephone number, size of business, website, etc.
- Contact the employer for possible employment.

Where Could This Job Lead?

Computer User Support Specialists may start in an entry-level position and handle simple problems. With experience, they may advance to positions where they handle questions on more complex systems. With additional training and experience, they may promote to other IT positions, such as computer programmers, network and computer systems administrators, or software developers. Others may become supervisors or consultants.

Related Occupations

Below is a list of occupations related to Computer User Support Specialists.

- Broadcast Technicians (SOC 27-4012)
- Computer Network Architects (SOC 15-1143)
- Computer Network Support Specialists (SOC 15-1152)
- Computer Programmers (SOC 15-1131)
- Computer Systems Analysts (SOC 15-1121)
- Electrical and Electronics Repairers, Commercial and Industrial Equipment (SOC 49-2094)
- Information Security Analysts (SOC 15-1122)
- Network and Computer Systems Administrators (SOC 15-1142)

Other Sources

- Association for Computing Machinery (ACM)
www.acm.org
- Computing Research Association
www.cra.org
- Help Desk Institute
www.thinkhdi.com
- Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) Computer Society
www.computer.org
- National Workflow Center for Emerging Technologies
www.nwcet.org
- Technology Services Industry Association
www.tsia.com

These links are provided for your convenience and do not constitute an endorsement by the EDD.

For the Career Professional

The following codes are provided to assist counselors, job placement workers, or other career professionals.

System	Code
SOC – <u>Standard Occupational Classification</u> at www.bls.gov/soc	15-1151
O*NET – <u>Occupational Information Network</u> at online.onetcenter.org	
Computer User Support Specialists	15-1151
<u>Interest Codes (RIASEC)</u> at online.onetcenter.org/find/descriptor/browse/Interests/#cur	RCI

The California Occupational Guides are a product of:
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